TRANSCRIPT—ROY HARRIS

Interviewee: Roy Harris

Interviewer: Pat Fitzpatrick

Interview Date: June 27, 2017

Location: 67 Haywood Street, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, N.C.

Length: 1 digital recording; 01:26:45

Transcriber: Pat Fitzpatrick

Transcription Date: 2017

Pat Fitzpatrick: I'm at the Pack Memorial Library today with Roy Harris. We are going to do what is under the auspices of the North Asheville Oral History Project, but we're probably going to cover other areas. We will begin with just when you were born, or where, and where you lived your early years.

Roy Harris: Okay. My name is Roy Harris and I was born May 28, 1950, in a little farming hamlet called Sladesville, North Carolina, properly Scranton, North Carolina, which is where the post office was at. And I grew up my formative early years, until the age of 18, in that little farming village, in a farming town, until I went off to college. I graduated from a segregated high school, at that time, and it was called O. A. Peay School. And it basically was one of two African-American schools in the county, one was an African-American school where O. A. Peay was on one end of the county and on the other end of the county an African-American school was Davis High School. And basically, even though we said high school, basically the school system was a one-campus deal. It went from the first grade all the way through twelfth grade on the same

campus. You just worked your way down the hallway and around and back out and then when you got to the, what was maybe called the high school portion of it, that was a separate--not a separate building, but there was--I think there was, at the end of the elementary and what we would maybe call middle school, there was a common bathroom area. And so once you passed the bathroom, then you headed into the high school section. And the high school section, maybe only five classrooms. Maybe six. And those classrooms were basically ninth grade homeroom, tenth grade homeroom, eleventh grade homeroom and seniors. And I think there was a science lab. So all the scheduling had to be around those classrooms, along with the science lab, which was separate from all of them. So one of those rooms was just the grade homeroom, and it was basically all African-American teachers at that time, except for my senior year. They had started the integration process. So the first level of that integration process in Hyde County was to send, to exchange Black and white teachers. And so some white teachers and staff came over O. A. Peay, and some of O. A. Peay's staff, African-American teachers, went to the other--the white school. I can't remember the name of it now, whether it was just Swans Quarter High School, but Swans Quarter High School. And so that was the first integration in Hyde County was to exchange teachers. And I left, graduated in 1968 from that small school system and went on to North Carolina A&T. So those were my--up until 18 years, was in that farming village and I was lucky enough in that village was maternal and paternal grandparents, aunts and uncles. Maybe there was 15 aunts and uncles on both sides of the family and about half of the aunts and uncles stayed in that town, or that village. And the other half migrated north. So the northern cousins would come back during the summer and during holidays to visit, but about half of them, you know, my

father was one of the--one of the siblings of my grandparents on my father's side, and then on my mother's side--it was about half and half. Half stayed in the hometown or somewhere around the hometown and then the other half had migrated to places like New Jersey, Connecticut, New York and-- The first group, they probably went to Norfolk, which is like 125 miles away. And then the other ones said, “No, I'm going further.” And somewhat it was to get off the farm. It was farming and for a lot of Black farmers it had gotten down to sharecropping at that time. And so a lot of them said, “I'm out of here. No more farming.” And they went on to--north, and some stayed. And I completed college and started my manufacturing engineering career at Westinghouse in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia and eventually went to Georgia. And then in 1983 I ended up here in Asheville, working for a plant at that time called Rockwell International. And worked there for 32 years at that plant and retired about four years ago and here I am, still in Asheville. So I spent the last 34 years here in Asheville.

PF: Wow. That's a long time considering how long you were at the other places. Now what area of Asheville do you live in?

RH: I live in what we call the Southside of Asheville which is off of Bartlett and South French Broad.

PF: And they still refer to that as Southside. It is, but--

RH: It's slowly being gentrified.

PF: So is it becoming, talking about it more of the River Arts District?

RH: Yes. In fact, my house is sort of at the corner of South French Broad and Bartlett Street, which is--and I have this, as a storyteller I have this story that I've developed and talk all about all the time, and I haven't figured out yet which way my house is moving, whether it's moving towards the River Arts District or whether it's moving toward what they call now the South Slope. And it's funny that I saw a map the other day and it was talking about that whole area of the railroad tracks and all of that down there, and I'm like "Oh, the name South Slope is in big letters now." The name "River Arts District" is in big letters. And it's almost like slowly, but slowly, the name of the community "Southside" will disappear, if we're not careful. If we don't stand up and scream and holler and doing everything that's possible. Those two will--because the River Arts District is coming on strong and the South Slope is sort of the beer capital of the world.

PF: And I think of it over more below the downtown--

RH: Right.

PF: --as opposed to over that far.

RH: Yeah, Coxe Avenue is sort of the dividing line now. And now there's being crossed over Coxe Avenue, on the other side of Coxe Avenue is the dividing line. And all of this area that I'm talking about now, where I live at, is in Census Tract 2. And Census Tract 2 basically goes from the corner of Biltmore to Hilliard Avenue, and you take Hilliard all the way down to Clingman, and then turn left on Clingman and go all the way down to the River Arts District. Work your way back up Depot Street and Lyman Street and Meadows. You dare not cross over into the Asheville-Buncombe Tech, that's not in the Census Tract. You skirt sort of around Asheville-Buncombe Tech, you bypass Asheville

High School and the hospital system, and you come back up on Biltmore Avenue and you come back. I think there's five housing projects in the area I just described to you. And so there's like carving out this--

PF: That is not then part of the gentrified areas?

RH: And this area is not a gentrified area. There's a struggle now, to gentrify. When you mentioned the North Asheville project, I was on the school board back in the 90s. And the North Asheville name was like, everything you talked about, it had to be in reference to the North Asheville and what was going on there, and who was there and especially Ira B. Jones school, and on that side of town Claxton school.

PF: Now when you say they mentioned them, what did that--you mean that was the “gold standard", so to speak? Is that what others hoped to attain?

RH: Right. It was like the gold standard, Ira B. Jones. And when you go back and--go back and look at the integration in Asheville High, Asheville City School, which is Asheville City School District, it's a separate district than Buncombe County. So Buncombe County surrounds the Asheville City School District. And Asheville City School District is one of the last five, six, city school districts in the state of North Carolina. So there's a district in every county, which would make there's 100 school districts. And then there's five city school districts, and Asheville is one of the few remaining ones. I think there's five in the whole state that there's a city school district within a county school district. And it's able to stay and hold its own because it taxes itself. So whenever you would talk about and if they get to that level, that Asheville was like “What does the North Asheville parents want?" And they were the most vocal.

PF: They weren't part of the city though, the city system, are they?

RH: Yeah.

PF: Oh, they are. Clear out there.

RH: It's from just as you go past Ira B. Jones school, sort of the district would wrap around.

PF: I'm in the Weaverville district, even though my address is Asheville, I'm that far north. My kids all went to the Weaverville schools.

RH: Some of these school districts would sort of go around Ira B. Jones school, back up on--what was that street that comes back out by Ingles and works its way back down Merrimon Avenue.

PF: Beaverdam.

RH: Beaverdam. I think Beaverdam is the boundary on that side for the city school district. Then the boundary on this side is Patton Avenue.

PF: Since you've retired, quote, unquote--looks like you're busy--I mean, I Googled you and, you know, a few things came up. Your storytelling, which was interesting. I didn't know that. Now, do you do that on a regular basis?

RH: Well, in the last year I haven't done it so much. I'm trying to now let go of some things and get back into more of a storytelling. I started telling it somewhat from a personal level. Last night I made a Facebook posting.

PF: About the storytelling?

RH: Right. Just trying to get your mind set on how you get these stories and whatever. As I was walking home last night, I was going down Buxton Avenue, which is Buxton Hall Restaurant there and the Vortex Donut place, which I stop at for coffee on occasion. And as I come down the street, I see this little white female standing holding the signpost. And as I approach her I'm like, “Why is she holding that signpost?" And she was steadying herself. And so I couldn't resist it. So I stopped and I says, “Can I help you hold this post up?" And she started to smile. And basically what she was doing was she was waiting for her husband to come pick her up. But that was her story. I'm like “Well, this used to work in the African-American community when the crack epidemic was happening in our community years ago. You could see folks with crack cocaine and all of that, they would just be standing holding the post. That's how bad that crack cocaine was. And you could see people doing all kinds of crazy stuff on the street because they would be out of it. And so that was what triggered that memory, crack cocaine epidemic. People standing on the corner, you couldn't figure out what in the world it was about. She was just standing there, so we had an entertaining conversation and then I moved on and she moved on, too. But it was interesting because as a storyteller, people always ask “Where do you get your stories from?" And I'm like, “Well, watch people. You'll see it.” Sometimes people will trigger a--what you are seeing that you may see may trigger a memory that you have and you just develop it from that memory. And so--and even when I talk about crack cocaine and that story and how that triggered that memory, then a story can move over to a political nature. And I'm like, “Wait a minute.” Not even knowing it has anything to do with it, what I just--this story. But it just has to do with life in general. I'm saying, wait a minute now. When crack cocaine was an epidemic in the African-American community,

most of the kids and young people went to jail. They got arrested. It was the cheapest form of cocaine, even though cocaine has been around, it was the cheapest derivative of this crack cocaine. The jails probably now is filled up with all these young people and all these people. And now that we have an opioid epidemic, it's a whole different story. It is like, “Oh, now we need to have clinics, all of this stuff.” Wait a minute, when the Black kids were in thing, y'all was putting them in jail. And now 30 years later you want to build clinics for them and not send them to jail and they need help. I'm like, America has not changed a lot. It is still the same in certain ways. Crack cocaine epidemic, send them to jail. Opioid, heroin epidemic, build clinics, build shelters, put millions of dollars in the state budget and the federal government budget to take care of this. What's the difference in my grandkids and your grandkids? They're grandkids. But how does the world treat them? Sometime I have a problem with that.

PF: Where do you see it going? Is it getting better or how do you--

RH: No. It's that color thing. It's that color thing that's always there, present. It rears its ugly head all through society. You look at society and study cultures, even among certain cultures you'll see that the darker skin of that culture is the lowest in that culture. All cultures, all over the world. And where that came from, I have no idea. Some want to attribute it to the Bible, whatever, but as you see it-- I was reading something the other day, it was talking about Native Americans and it sort of said some Native Americans that were dark-skinned were wiped out. And so I got to study it in more details. They're getting more to understand it but it was like, “Oh, the dark Indians are different than the red-skinned Indians. And the dark Indians may have been wiped out.” Hmmm. That thing

about Black and white permeates our cultural, and I don't know if we will ever get rid of it. Maybe when Jesus come back.

PF: Even now with so much intermarriage, you'd think that would kind of give the idea that, you know, that in time it would be less. But it's still that faction, I guess, with others.

RH: Yeah, even now with--and most of us, in our families now, we see the intermarriage thing. My brother just called and he has a daughter that is half African-American and half Jewish. And she's in college now but as he talked to me over the years, I could see where she kept going, sounded like she went in and out of both cultures. And I guess it's how smoothly she's flowed in and out of both cultures will determine somewhat who she is. On this side of the family, she basically has poor farmers that, you know, our history is in farming in the South and everything. And on her mother's side of the family it is, her legacy and history is in her mother's Jewish, her grandparents are Jewish. She's the only, I think she's the only grandchild. I remember him telling me one time that she was off to camp. I'm like “What camp?" And he said, “Somewhere up in New Hampshire.” And then I say, “Well, how much did that cost you?" He said, “Well, it don't cost me anything because the grandparents sent her up there.” And he said, “I think it costs about $3,000 a week", or something to that effect. All right, okay, well, parents around here struggle how to come up with $40 a week, or $25 a week, to send their kids to summer camp. And so she's off in college now and just came back from Rome. And as she returned back from Rome, he wants her to--she's never really been to our hometown. So he wants to put that part of her legacy, “Look, you've got to go where my side of the family.”

PF: Has she not visited there?

RH: She never has and I've got to talk to him about that, why. But she never has and now she's, I think they was planning a trip a couple of weeks ago and something happened and it fell through. But she has to, you know, I said, “Before she goes off and get married, finish college," I said, she's going to go there, but it would probably be better if she went there. Sooner or later she will find her way there, which is just to pass through or whatever, but I said, “It would be better if you took her there.” And I said, “But it's going to be hard. Somebody who just played in Rome to come back and go to Scranton, North Carolina.”

PF: Well, since you've come to Asheville, you've been here thirty-some years, that's quite a change anyway now. How do you see it as far as the integration within the community? And I've been told by other African-Americans here that this area isn't necessarily like other areas because it has its own--maybe every place does--it's own dealing with that, that it isn't the same as, say, Philadelphia or New York or New Jersey. I don't know. How do you compare it since you have lived other places?

RH: Well, you've got to think that maybe in the rest of North Carolina, or just take Buncombe County. African-American population in Buncombe County may be 5 percent of the population. So the Buncombe County population is, say, 300,000, then you're talking about maybe 15,000. Of the 300,000 maybe in Buncombe County, that 15,000 of them may be African-American, with probably 12 percent of them being in the City of Asheville. So as you leave Asheville and start to go out into other areas, you'll see that, you know, we're just a small percentage of the whole county. So, yes, there is a difference in that you just look at percentage, what percentage of African-American is this general metropolitan area, opposed to some other city where you may have 50, 60, 70

percent. It may, in one sense, represent “Oh, well, this is around the country", until you look at African-American percentage in the United States. It may be 12, 13 percent. So Asheville, in one sense, represents the United States, as far as African-Americans. What's happening now is the browning of America and as the browning of America goes, maybe that number is out there somewhere in 2050 or whatever, there will be many more brown folks in the United States than there are whites. And so that's having some dynamics that's playing out right now at certain levels.

PF: Now, this is my ignorance speaking. When you say “the brown folks.” And I've heard that term. Does that include African-Americans?

RH: Uh-huh, right.

PF: Okay. They're not still kept in their own category. Okay.

RH: But it's kind of funny, you know, just as I walked in here someone handed me a flyer and I think it was an ACLU person. And they must have a new director in town, or a new whatever. I don't know that much about the ACLU chapter here, chapter or branch or whatever it is here in Asheville. But she handed me a flyer and then she said, “We have a new director. Come here our speaker or come here and I'll introduce you to her.” And she said, “She's African-American-Caribbean.” I'm like, okaaay. And she said something to the effect that's the way she wants to be identified, African-American-Caribbean. Okay, okay, okay. So I just, from the door till I met you, I was processing. Okay, African-American-Caribbean. Yeah, she's probably right. She's probably from the Islands. I think she said she was from Jamaica. And she grew up in Jamaica or something like that. And, in turn, moved to the United States and maybe got her college education and all of that. I

would think that if she's ACL president then she probably has a college education from somewhere and she's moving to Asheville, I suspect. I don't know the young lady. But an African-American-Caribbean, which she can say yes, but it's curious as to why she would identify.

PF: Like to differentiate?

RH: Differentiate, and then we differentiate all kinds of cultures, and all kinds of colors. But African-American-Caribbean. And it's like, okay, so some of the slaves were in the Caribbean and then some left the Caribbeans and came to the United States. But they all came from Africa. Maybe to the Caribbean was a stopover and it may have been even a stopover to fatten them up, to get them ready for the slave market in America. But then, because they had, I guess it was sugar cane down there, sugar crops, some of them may have stayed in the islands, to work there, the sugar plantation, the sugar cane plantation. So, yes, in one sense yes, there's African slaves Caribbean. So, but I still have to process it, to understand it. But technically, yes. Now that she's living here, maybe she grew up in the States and her parents may have migrated from the islands to here.

PF: Well, you know where to go to the meeting and find out.

RH: Yes, right [laughter].

PF: How many Black leaders do you, like yourself. I consider you a leader, going to these places, being involved, you mentioned being on the school board. Do you see, of that 12 percent or whatever, how many Black leaders then get out into the community?

RH: Well, the next generation is coming, which will be the age of my children or my grandchildren. I have a son that's 44, and then I have two daughters that were raised in my household that are 32 and 30. And I have a grandchild that's in her 20s, early 20s, in college. So as I look at this thing as a generational thing, it is now--I am decreasing, they are increasing. And that's what happens, you know. One generation decreases and the other generation increases. So I can see that age group from the top of that generation would be my son's age, in their 40s, early 40s. And then the bottom of that generation would be my grandkids. And so as they start to emerge, I sort of feel that it is my duty or my own legacy to pass on what I've gone through and what I've learned to them so that now they can formulate how they are going to see the world. A good example of that is--it may not be a good example, but a good example for me is my daughter who works for the hospital system in Charlotte, Mecklenburg, called me, says, “Daddy, I'm heading to a diversity conference.” And I said, “Oh, okay. Let's talk about it when you get back.” And she said, “Why?" and I said, “Diversity to me meant you're either Black or white", since I came up through the 60s, 70s, went to an HBCU school, on out into the work world and all of that. And I'm saying, so we--Affirmative Action, a word you don't even hear anymore, you dare say that word. But it was a big word back in the 60s, 70s, and as it went on, went to that environment. And I said, “Call me up and let's talk about it when you get back.” She said, “Well, it's a conference that the hospital system puts on and they have this consultant group that comes on and puts the conference on and puts the workshop on and they encourage their employees to attend it.” Then I guess a group of employees are always going to it. So this is her turn and she says, “All right, I'll go to it", you know. “They're going to pay me for the day so I'll go to it.” And then we talked about

it that night. I says, “Well, for me, during my era of working in corporate American, it was Black and white. You were either Black or you was white. That was the dividing line.” I said, “Then at the end, as I came to the end of my career, then you could add females. And then the word, then you started to add other groups, and LGBT and all of that started.” Sort of surfaced as I was ending my career in there. And so I said, “What did you see at your conference?" And she said, she described and talked about it and everything, and then she said--evidently they did some of skit at the conference, and she said, “Oh, there was one skit that the person was lobbying for autism.” I said, “Tell me about that.” She said, “Well, basically it was, you know, during the skit he was saying 'I have maybe a 20-year-old child that is autistic or autism'", whatever the right term is. “And he should have the right to employment, just like everybody else.” In fact, because he's 20 years, just like any other parent, you want them to, what, be on their own, make their own money and whatever. And so then that brings up that--I saw a number somewhere, maybe 1 in 5 kids that's born--

PF: I think it's a spectrum. You know, there's all the way from sort of to--

RH: Right. But then that was like adding that to it, I guess. Right, adding that to it, that diversity thing. So I'm like, “Oh, okay. Now, we didn't talk about that.” But now, you know, I could see it. And if they say 1 in 5 children is going to be in that spectrum, then yes, it's going to be an employment issue and all of that that has to go with that, it's going to be out there. And then she went on, “Oh, this is a big category now, it's just no longer Black and white, male female. Then you got male female, you got all the other terms that go with this and you add all of this in and--.” “Okay. I'm going to the house.”

PF: That could be a long conversation.

RH: Right.

PF: Especially with her just beginning her career and everything.

RH: Right. Right.

PF: Oh, my gosh. It's great she has you to talk about it with though.

RH: Right. And that's, one of my generation is, we're trying to now let our--the next generation know just because you didn't see it like we saw it, Black and white, all of that, that that doesn't mean it's not there. We saw it blatantly during my, you know, being born in 1950.

PF: You saw the whole change in your youth, as it went into it. Yeah.

RH: Right, you know, so I saw, you know, segregated schools, segregated dining places, segregated places. You know, I was able to witness that at a personal level. If your parents say, “We going up north but hold your pee, because we don't have a lot of choices where we can stop at to use the bathroom.” And so I remember that from my father, you know, “Hold it. Learn how to hold it", and trying to figure out where were these places as you went north or went anywhere, that you could stop to use the bathroom. And that was even public accommodations. And so, my daughters didn't grow up and see that. They grew up going to Asheville High School. And, of course, over there they were able to see it somewhat, even at the high school level, they were starting to see this separation of class and race and all of that because Asheville High School is made up of maybe 50/50, at one point. I don't know what it is now. And my granddaughter comes along and they

probably don't even know what the word “discrimination" is, or separation and so on. She came up in--but the sad part about it, they may not see it in their early formative years and then they hit high school and they start to see it. And then they are hit, the work world, and they are starting to see it. In fact, I asked my granddaughter one day, she was working for somebody, part time last year and I said, “Well, how many Blacks work there where you're at?" And you could tell, even though she was on the phone, you could tell that she was like “What?"

PF: That you even asked.

RH: She was like “Why would you even ask that question?" And she thought about it, maybe she called me back a couple months later and she said, “Oh, by the way, there's five of us here.” Oh, right. So it helped her just to--oh, well.

PF: But in a way that's good, that they don't have to think about that, you know, that there's quotas and so on that, “Well, they hired me.” I guess that's good.

RH: Yeah, but “They hired me" is a bigger picture. But the whole thing out there is “Oh, they only hired you. How many more came after you?" Oh, okay, then look at that.

PF: Now, you've been back here 30-some years, have you always lived in that area you live in now?

RH: Yeah.

PF: Now, what changes have you seen there, at that area? You mentioned some there, but in the total.

RH: I'm trying to understand this word called “gentrification", and it's all levels, trying to understand what is it at every level. What is it--people throw that word around real easy and what are they saying at the county level, at the city level, at the income level, at the race level. What is all this? And it's a easy word throw out there. Real easy. But, you know, where is it happening, you know. And the more I think about it, oh, it's happening all over, you know. I go to my hometown and I stand on the family plot which is now maybe 2 acres, and I start to think “Well, Granddaddy probably owned 40 acres around here. Where did it go?" And as I stand on this family plot, I hear the sound “nnnnnnnnn.” What is that? So I look up and here comes this humongous tractor with four big tires on it. And it's pulling a planter that maybe can plant 16 rows at a time. And he stops and he--he sort of stops and I'll say--we start a conversation and I say, “Oh, okay. I'm just standing here on the edge of the family plot that, you know, my grandfather raised a family here and this is where my father was born and raised and all of that.” And he said, “Oh, okay.” And I say, “Where are you from and what are you doing?" And he says, oh, I live in some town that's maybe 50 miles away. And he said, “Oh, I'm just an equipment operator and I come in town early in the morning and they tell me down over the whatever and send me messages to what I'm supposed to do today.” And the night before, someone has gassed up his equipment and all of that, then he's in and out, “I go to work. I know by the GPS where I'm supposed to be.” And I'm like, “Oh.” So now it becomes corporate farming initiative. Hmmm. So, this is--it was like, African-American farmers are so small in number now, it's a shame. We used to be the farmers. And then they went to sharecropping. And then it went to going to the family farm, to now it's down to we are like going extinct, African-American farmers. And the land is being lost. And it's almost,

it's crazy. I was talking to a young lady the other day and she opened my eyes to something. We was down on The Block, Asheville Block, and we was down there. She opened my eyes and she said, she said something that I said, “What?" And she says, “Well, I'm from Charlotte and all down in what they used to call the First Ward or something", where the African-American district used to be, which is sort of this end of town, and she says it is almost gone and all of that. And then she said something that, she said, “Oh, yeah, they'll knock a hole in the wall to get it condemned.” I'm like, “What did you just say?" She says, “A plan of buildings that people are trying to hold onto, now they'll knock a hole in the wall and that makes it unstable. So now you have to do something about it or it's unstable so we've got to get rid of it.” And I'm like, “I've seen some of those holes.” Developers want to take over. So I said, “Yeah, from an engineer's standpoint, yeah, you knock a hole in the wall somebody will come along and say “That's an unstable building, you all got to do something about it or if you don't do something about it, we're going to have to condemn it and if we condemn it then it will go on the market to the highest bidder.”

PF: They also put the highways down there, the wards have been really hard hit on the highways.

[Break.]

PF: I know you came to Asheville after the main effects of the--or not the effects, but the actual doing of the Urban Renewal and Model Cities programs, but in the area you live down there on Southside, do you have neighbors and people in your circle that talk about what life was like then and how it differs now?

RH: Yes, I do. I have lots of stories that--a quick story is that I was, Barbara Pagan who lives on the same street I live on and Mrs. Pagan is probably in her eighties, somewhere in there. I happen to, you know, she was one of those neighbors that invited my family in and got to know who we were and in that particular time it was probably about 95 percent Blacks that lived in that neighborhood.

PF: At the time you moved there?

RH: Right, at the time I moved there in the eighties. I sort of look at what's happening on my street to determine how does this happen, what's going on in the world. And so when I moved to 59 Bartlett Street, most of the neighbors, if not 100 percent of them, in the 14 homes that I said that are on that street, that block that I'm on, are African-American. And most of their homes at that time was probably, half of them were led by a matriarch of the family. Ms. Simmons, Ms. Pagan and all those kinds of individuals. And so sometime there was three generations, maybe, in a home. But basically the neighborhood was African-American Black. And I remember walking and talking to Miss Pagan one day. This may have been 30-some years ago. And she kept, as she was talking, she kept pointing. We was in her front yard and she kept pointing like, you know, “down there", “Southside Avenue", and “Nasty Branch Creek", and “the funeral home" and all of that. And I'm like “What in the world is she talking about?" Because I had walked, I had been around the neighborhood.

PF: And so you didn't know about all that before, I mean, urban renewal or removal?

RH: Right.

PF: Oh.

RH: So I decided, “Oh, okay.” And being sort of a local history buff, you know, so I said, “Oh, okay, well let me sort of figure out what she was saying", because I didn't want to insult her by questioning, at that time, “What are you talking about?" Because she just sort of assumed that I knew. But she kept on and then I would say, “Oh, okay.” So one day I was out walking and I'm like, “Oh, there's Nasty Branch. Oh, okay. So that's the creek she was talking about that went down through the neighborhood, just maybe a block and a half away from our houses.” And so I started studying, “Oh, there's Southside Avenue.” So I came up to the North Carolina Room and I says, I asked them like, “Where is Southside Avenue?" I just know Southside Avenue as coming from Biltmore down to McDowell Street. And I'm like, okay, so there's a transmission place on it, there's a couple of RC Cola. Then I'm like--but that wasn't what she was talking about. She was talking about a whole neighborhood, whatever. And I think Zoe in there pulled out a map and says, “Oh, there's Southside Avenue.” It went from Biltmore Avenue down Pfiffer and on all the way down to where Mr. Green's store is now, behind the Grant Center. And, you know, so I got it and I looked at it and I went like, “Okay. So this sort of followed the creek along here all the way to here.” And so then a couple years later I went out walking and, well, where's all this stuff? And so then the North Carolina Room again and says, “Oh, well, go get the City Directory.” So I went and got a City Directory and I picked a date and I'm like, okay, so this City Directory said on Southside Avenue these folks live here and these buildings was here. And I didn't see--it didn't have any picture or anything, it was just 59 or something street. I'm like, “There was a whole neighborhood down here. It was a big neighborhood.” And then I started, I think, I'll find

that article one day, but I wrote an article basically saying, “From now on I live on the Southside.” And I got a couple of phone calls. And it was like, “What?" Some people was almost telling me “Leave it alone. Don't drag up that history.”

PF: And these were Blacks that were doing this?

RH: Well, one was a Black guy and maybe it was a white that basically says--and in fact I was telling them, I came from a town--I'll find that article one day. And they was like, “Why don't you move back to your hometown?" It was like, “Don't drag up no mess here.” And I sort of said, “Okay, okay. I done stuck my nose in something that I didn't have no business sticking my nose.” But then it was curious. I went from City Directory to a map that showed streets to finding urban renewal and urban redevelopment and started to understand that big picture. And then as I would walk the neighborhood I was like, “Oh, okay. This street came right down here and all these homes were on it and all the homes", and so I made a couple calls and said, “What are you all talking about this?" And they said, well, it says--well, basically they were telling me “You were not here, so you don't know all the details, why we did all this?" All right, I'm just a local history guy that just likes to figure out stuff like that. My background in engineering says figure out what, you know, the light is either on or it's off, so-- So I studied it for a while and then I went about four or five years. I would walk the creek, find the streets, find out what was going on and sort of just digging my knowledge more and more and more. Probably somewhere in my house now there's a file on all of this. But then I kept getting a signal from Black and white that because I didn't grow up in that area, I don't know what's going on.

PF: Well, that's interesting. Especially now, they're digging it up and making it like it's a cause celeb or something.

RH: Right. But that was what everybody was telling me. Everybody was sort of telling me, “Well, you didn't grow up here. You don't know anything about this.” And I reminded somebody one day that every year four or five books come out on the Civil War. And how many of you were in the Civil War? Nobody, as of now, I don't think, lived then. But it was like, okay, you just search documents and you search history and you read this and you read that, so--or some got away from me for a while, and I said, “Oh, okay.”

PF: Well, they had a program actually on it, because they are kind of making that a historical area more now, I guess. And I went to that and Zoe went. It wasn't really well attended, but it was down at the Grant Center, two months ago, something like that?

RH: Yeah, two months ago. Yeah.

PF: And Marcel Proctor was there, and his wife.

RH: Marcel grew up in there.

PF: Yeah, Fagg Street, F-a-g-g.

RH: Right, which is--

PF: Like a little hollow.

RH: --hollowed out. In fact, I walk past it every day and it's like, “Oh, there used to be houses down there.”

PF: Yeah. I did his interview, an interview with him, after that and it was--I guess what surprised me was the extent to which it was integrated, Black and a lot of white families in there.

RH: Yeah. On that side of the street.

PF: The street?

RH: South French Broad.

PF: Oh, uh-huh.

RH: South French Broad was like the dividing line.

PF: But it was fine. They got along, it sounded wonderfully, except school. They still had only Black at school. But out of school, and the families got along well. He said they just--something happened in a Black family or a white family, they were all there, you know, this and that.

RH: Well, from my study, South French Broad was the dividing line somewhat. Whites lived on this side and Blacks more on this side and so on. But then I just was curious about, I think Priscilla Nigel(?) had done a study on urban redevelopment, urban renewal and model cities, and then the more I dug into it, I realized, “Oh, okay, well here's some folks that some of them were still living 20 years ago that had a big party and that." But some of them kept sending me the signal that “You don't know. You just studied it a little bit, so, no.”

PF: That's why you need them to tell you.

RH: Right. [Laughing.] Well, you tell me. And then I think I had one Black person to tell me it was because of the sewage issue. I'm like, okay, well, I can see that. You know, a creek flows from here to the river, that's the way a creek flows and so, okay, if you have a sewage problem, yeah, you would have had a problem. Or flooding, oh, yeah, if there's not proper drainage in this area, then you'd have had flooding issues. And it's just like flooding issues all over the world. They can go from here and you not be able to pay attention to them. But then I learned that, okay, well, the federal government probably came along and said, “We got some money. Do something about those issues", and Asheville may have said, “We'll take some of that money. And we'll take care of that issue.” And so they did. And they put people in place and whatever.

PF: Are you familiar with the Stumptown community.

RH: Uh-huh.

PF: That's another one. 221 families were living there and now it's a tennis court, basically.

RH: Yeah.

PF: And then down that little area between them and the cemetery.

RH: Right. Yeah. Phyllis Sherrill was a friend of mine. We became friends and she would always talk about Stumptown. And one day I just got up and I walked over there.

[Break.]

RH: Okay. The James Key Hotel, which I saw a picture of it the other day, which as down on about where Grand Center is now. Somewhere in that general area. It was a grand location. They used to have singers and maybe Aretha Franklin and James Brown that used to come there and entertain during what they call “the chitling circuit.” And the chitling circuit was the rock 'n roll singers and the R 'n B singers back in the 50s and 60s. As they got their careers started, they would get on--basically start in the north and work their way down south and work their way back up around and go back north. You know, they would perform in sometimes one-night stands and everything. And the James Key Hotel may have been one of those circuits that they would stop at every once in a while. The hotel, because of what it was at the end, we almost forgot about it. And sometime when something is bad at the end, and it may not have reached its glory, we won't even talk about the glory of it. And I've discovered and sort of was talking about it one day and it was like, “No, I don't want to talk about that.” Because of what was--and then I met a guy one day that was sitting out there behind, maybe Mr. Green's store one day. And he was just sitting there and he says, “I understand you want to know about what went on down here.” And I'm like, “Yeah, I'm just curious.” And he said, basically, go buy me a bottle of wine and we can talk. I said, “I don't know how to buy wine. I haven't bought wine in 20 years.” I said, “What brand you drink?" He said, “Come on back.” Someone had told me, when you're talking to older African-Americans, sit below them. Don't sit at the same level, they told me, sit below them. And so I made it a point and I said, “Talk.” And he says, “Railroad, James Key Hotel. All of that was big down here. Gambling, prostitution, whatever.” And he said it was driven somewhat by the railroad that came up the mountains, both ways. African-American porters, workers on the railroad. Maybe

there was a stopover here, a stopover in Asheville. And he said basically the game was, they had money. So the locals had to figure out how to get that money. But by the same token, he says they was trying to figure out how to get the local money, commerce and everything. Because they were going back down the mountain. So it was a game, it was a game that was going on. The railroad men had a steady income and they were a higher level of income than normal. And so they would come in and these elaborate poker games or these elaborate card games, they would come in. And of course the locals went to them because they knew that they had money. And so that was that commerce down there. And it covered, it covered the spectrum of what that society would have been like, maybe from prostitution to gambling to drugs to alcohol, to whatever. And he said that was the game we played was, you know, they came in, we came in, and it was all because they were going to leave at some time. And he described some of the elaborate card game that they may have played. And I can't remember the name of it right now, but it was whoever had the money at the end, they left town. So the idea was--it was like whoever had the biggest pot at the end, when the whistle blew on the train, it was time for you to go. “I'm sorry, guys, this game is over. See you all later on. Thank you very much for your money and I'm out of here.”

And so people don't want to talk about that side of the business. But it was a big part of the commerce. In fact, down there they may have had a street that was called Death Alley. But the railroad was there and they took up all remnants of that society ever happened down there. Used to be a beautiful train depot right there in the curve. If you would go down there now, where is it?

PF: Yeah. They said it was a--one lady, a lady that lives now in Hillcrest, she said that it was the most beautiful building. People would go there, they would take their children there for an outing. It was pink marble. She said it was just an unbelievable building.

RH: And you would wonder why would a city--maybe they blame it, “Oh, those railroad folks did that. That wasn't nothing to do with the city.”

PF: That's like the roundhouse that was over there, which I loved, you know. But the railroad's the one that took it down. It was their property, that was their thing. The Preservation Society tried to keep it from happening and they were like “It's railroad property. It's ours.”

RH: But my thing as a storyteller is somewhat tell stories, there are stories at every level. whatever it is, and tell everybody's story, good, bad or indifferent. Tell everybody's story. And that makes for a richer history. And so when you tell those stories, it's interesting if everybody gets a chance to tell it. It's like my ancestors telling their story that eating a pig you went from the rooter to the tooter. In other words, every piece of that pig was eaten or processed or something. There was hardly any waste in it. But if you only want to talk about the pork chops and the ham, from one culture and one society, then that's okay. But then the hog head and the pig tail, that was part of another society. And so if you don't want to talk about the hog head and the pig tail, then that was part of this society of what they ate. You had the choice meats, but then you ought to have somebody--and every once in a while, you can go in a Ingles, or maybe not Ingles store so much. What is Ingles other places?

PF: Oh, there's one up on--I know which one you mean. I like to go to that one on--they have that one on Merrimon and it's quick in and quick out and they play fifties music.

[Laughter.]

PF: I love it. I call it faux Ingles.

RH: Right. Is it Sales? Sav-Mor.

PF: Sav-Mor, that's it. Yeah. Yeah, they have some of those parts but they have good meat, too.

RH: Right. But then when you go there, you're like, maybe not see a big [ ] at a regular Ingles store, but you can go there and get chicken feet, because there's a culture that still buys it.

PF: Yeah, they're selling it or it wouldn't be there.

RH: Right. They wouldn't put it in the store if they weren't selling it. So we went in there and the side story is that I took my friend Erin Daniels, who is a UNCA anthropology major and she graduated a year ago. And she was doing a study on the food deserts.

PF: On food what?

RH: Deserts.

PF: Deserts?

RH: Yeah.

PF: Food deserts.

RH: They are basically if there is no grocery store within five miles of where you live, you live in a food desert.

PF: Oh. Yeah.

RH: And of course Southside is a food desert. There's no grocery store there.

PF: Mr. Green's doesn't count?

RH: No, Mr. Green is--some may think that Mr. Green would count, but that's not the definition. It's a mile away or five miles away that there's no grocery stores that you live in a food desert. And she's doing her study on that. And so she--I was part of her study a year ago and then she got her bachelor's degree and now she's wrapping up her career somewhat, in Asheville, so she's sort of wrapping up that study. Of course, I have no doubt that Erin is going on to be a PhD and a college professor at some point in her life. But at 24 or 22 years of age she's still finding herself, but--so she said, “Mr. Harris, we're going to wrap it up.” And I said, “No, we ain't wrapped up this story yet.” And I said, “This story would never be wrapped up as long as you and I live.” And so she, she said, “Well, what's coming now?" I said, “The bus runs about two blocks from your house.” She lived over on Congress Street at that time. And I said, “Walk out of your house, go down to South French Broad and catch the bus and I'll meet you up the street later on. I get on that same bus.” And she said, “Where are we going?" And I says, “Just follow my lead.” So she got on the bus. I met her at the corner of Bartlett and South French Broad. I got on the bus. And she said, “Where we going?" I said, “We're going to Walmart out at Sayles River View or River something they call it over there.” She says, “Oh.” I said, “I'm going to buy groceries.” And the point was, if I want to buy groceries that maybe

that's the closest route, that's one route that I may have to take. Not because of convenience, because this is what I have to do.

PF: And you also have to make sure you don't buy more than you can carry on the bus.

RH: Right.

PF: Oh, gosh. That's the hard part.

RH: Right. And I says--well, what triggered me was I saw a lady and I didn't get off at my stop. I noticed she had Walmart bags. And so I said, “I'm just going to stay on to see where she gets off.” And so she went all the way down, right in front of the Grant Center, and she got off the bus and then she went across the street with her bags, headed for Livingston Apartments. And I said, that triggered me that that's the way she grocery shops, because she used public transportation. So she goes from Livingston Street Apartments, get on the bus, make the hour route out to Walmart and Sayles Bleachery, East Asheville, buy her groceries, get back on the bus, come all the way around. Oh, by the way, she doesn't buy water.

PF: Yeah.

RH: Yeah. You better make a special trip.

PF: Or even a gallon of milk.

RH: Or milk. You don't buy it because it's a heavy weight. And I says, “Oh, the other route is you either have neighbors or something pick you up, or children, whatever, pick you up and take you grocery shopping.” But if you have to use transportation--the other

route is, you get on the bus, go the ART station and get on a W-5 bus, go to Patton Avenue and go to Sav-Mor's. And if you time it just right, you can get back on the bus as it comes back around, and come back home and everything. But then that's still a minimum of an hour trip. And I said, so that's what folks in this neighborhood have to do because there's no major grocery store here and they're in a food desert, so they have to make that trip, that round trip. I said it's either about, if you don't have transportation by your children or public transportation, or by the bus system, and to go grocery shopping is not just a convenient “On my way home let me stop and do this.” No, it's--they have to deliberately--

PF: Put aside a day or a half a day.

RH: A half day, a minimum of half a day to do this.

PF: Which gets more difficult with age.

RH: Yeah. It's like I, at 67, as I go toward that age, it's like, “Okay. How am I going to work this system if I don't want a car?" Or even if I have a car, how do I navigate how to do this and everything. One way is about public transportation, which is just a whole 'nother story, too. The bus system, the complaints I hear, and then listen to both sides of the story. It's like some people says, “Well, the bus system doesn't work for me anymore because I'm either walking uphill or downhill. It's just too much.” And then the bus system says, “Well, we can't make a stop at everybody's front door and we can't make a stop at all these stops. We just have to pick a route.” Okay. We understand your side of the business, but then there's another side of it, too. Hmmm. How things change but they stay the same.

PF: Yeah. I'm still not understanding exactly--do you see that getting any better as far as when you're asking the questions, having the people answer them better? Or better than, say, 30 years ago when you asked questions, maybe they were--you'd think they'd want to tell you the stories is the way I would see it. But why would they think that you, of all people, should not know these stories? It's just because you didn't live it? I guess I'm missing that.

RH: Right. Guarded history.

PF: But it's out there. It's history.

RH: Right. They don't--maybe not feeling comfortable that you're going to tell my story. And so they may guard themselves. Let's say that you had a, your family history was in bootlegging. Now, in your culture, oh, that was--Popcorn Sutton was great.

[Laughter.]

RH: But in my culture, maybe granddaddy who so-and-so was a bootlegger or made moonshine, in my culture now that isn't such a great thing to be talking about.

PF: Yeah, but that's different than the history of the city that's actually all on record, you know. It's just that they lived here then and you didn't. That's the part I guess I fail to see.

RH: Yeah. And then the history part of it, I don't want to go too controversial here, but Confederate monuments? The monuments are all to losers. They lost the war. And these great statues are to losers. Now, they may have won the battle, but the overall is the Confederacy lost the war. But, you see, these statues all over.

PF: I guess the ones that admired them, have gone to that, what they thought of them at the time and kind of passed that on and they probably don't stop to think about it that way exactly. It's a good way to put it.

RH: Right. Right. It's like in Asheville, “Oh, I'll go down to Asheville.” Vance monument, I think there's a statue or monument, something right down there in front of the courthouse. Somebody said maybe five things down there, to that history. And there's no monument or anything to African-American history in Asheville. But then that realm of “monuments.” I'm like, okay, oh, well, they were here and they have a part in the Union army and all of that, but there's nothing there that--now, you can say, well, put your own, and, you know, Daughters of the Confederacy or whatever may raise the money to put this monument up. But then if you look at it, maybe--okay, we got all these monuments and over here we have nothing. So how do we get something? And in some towns--New Orleans just took down four or five of them, right. And the young lady that climbed the flagpole in Columbia, South Carolina, to take down the flag, Confederate flag, I think she's going to be in Asheville this fall. They're going to do a painting of her and it's basically titled around Americans who tell the truth. So--but that's a whole 'nother story, a whole 'nother topic. But it's--maybe it's not. Maybe it's just--

PF: A continuum.

RH: A continual, or how people had to struggle, how people struggled and how people went through, whatever they went through. My pastor, Dr. John H. Grant at Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church, preached a sermon yesterday which talked about Ephesians 6 and 14, I think. Which talks about the church. And he reminded us that maybe that 11

o'clock hour, we always think of it, a lot of time people would say, “The 11 o'clock hour is one of the most segregated hours there is in America," which is probably true.

PF: 11 in the midday?

RH: Yeah. 11 o'clock church service on Sunday morning may be the most segregated time there is in history, in whatever. But he took it another direction. He said, “It may be the most peaceful time there is in the world, Sunday morning, 11 o'clock.” Wherever those congregations are, Black, white, green or yellow, they come together in unity, to worship God. And he didn't say, “Now, at 1 o'clock it may change.” But from 11 o'clock to 1 o'clock time frame, it's one of the most peaceful times in the world, when Christians come together and worship. All the bickering and all of that may be put aside during that hour, if we're true worshippers. If we're not, we brought some junk into the church, yeah. And he reminded us, a lot of times folks will say, “Oh, I ain't going to church. Ain't but a bunch of hypocrites in there, a bunch of mess and everything.” He said, “Let's go back to the Bible and weren't Peter and Paul and Matthew and all them, weren't they having some issues?" Yeah, uh-huh. So just because we are Christian does not mean that we do not have differences of opinions, it does not mean that we have differences, that we hash out among ourself, but that 11 o'clock hour we sort of put them aside for a while.

PF: And you look your best.

[Laughter.]

RH: Right, you look your best. You can feel your best. It's at the end of a work week and it's just a time that we come and worship God and everything. I'm like, wow.

PF: Yeah, thinking about that makes you want to go, too, then I think. If people would hold on to that thinking, that feeling, that they would have that just to go.

RH: Let's go to church and all, let's go to church and take these issues to God and he's already worked them out for us and so all we have to do is follow his lead. But he sort of reminded me, even in the early churches there was all kinds of stuff going on.

PF: Even reading about the last supper, my gosh, all that kind of intrigue that was going on there.

RH: Life is good, God is good.

PF: Well, even though you're not from the Asheville area, the one thing we've been putting on is the full names of your parents and grandparents. What were the full names of your grandparents, if you recall.

RH: On my father's side it was Walter and Gladys Harris. My grandmother was a Gibbs and my father was a Harris, and so there's a whole history behind that. On my mother's side, it was Nathaniel and Elnora Barrow. That was on my mother's side. And now that you ask that, I could go on and on for another hour about the fact that my brother and I have started a study on our Native American history. In our family lore and our family history, it basically said that three Barrow girls, which were from Native American culture, married three Barrow--three Mackey girls. I'm sorry. Three Mackey girls married three Barrow boys. And there's a whole intrigue in the family around that. And so the Mackey girls were part of our Native American history. So we're studying who they were and all of that. But as we study this, we find there were six Mackey girls. Okay. All right,

used to say there was three Mackey girls married three Barrow boys, now where did the other three Mackey, what did they do? I think we're going to find out they intermarried, because the three Mackey girls that we talk about in our family lore married three African-American men. Which now we know, “Oh, actually the African-American men were mixed, too", white. And then you think, “Oh, maybe them other three girls married in another culture, married in the whites.” And as we dig into it, we think that's what we are going to find.

PF: Wow. What a reunion that will be.

RH: [Laughing.] Yeah, if you can get it. It's like Sally Hemings?

PF: Yes.

RH: Right. They went through some fights in there to figure out, you know.

PF: But then all of a sudden, then they're celebrating it.

RH: Right. Right. But, so we sort of had that Sally Hemings thing in our family, too. So as we study, and as we study our Native American culture, it is intriguing, it is interesting, and it's heart-breaking. All three of them together. It's like as we chase this and as we follow these rabbit trails and we get to the rabbit hole, we go down in the rabbit hole, we're like “Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute.” Last September my youngest daughter got married in Fayetteville and my brother came up from New Jersey--came down from New Jersey--to be at the wedding. And I says, “I'm tired of you talking about this Native American thing. How much time you got? Let's go.” He said, “Where we going?" And I said, “Remember that place you called, you said that somebody had hit

that or hit on Ancestry.com about they were part of who we are?" I said, “Didn't they mention a place called Gingaskin Reservation?" And he said, “Yeah.” I said, “Okay. Wedding's over. Got one of them married off. I got a couple of days. You got weeks, we're both retired. We're going to the Gingaskin Reservation.” And so we left here and we drove about six hours, from Fayetteville up to on the other side of Chesapeake, Virginia, in a town called Eastville. And so we [ ] that name. We went over there where we were looking at Eastville. It's a little town right off the--I don't know whether you all been across the Chesapeake Bay Bridge?

PF: Might have been across it and that's it.

RH: Right as you get across about 30 miles there's a town called Eastville. So we ended up in Eastville and we were looking around and then we started talking about Native Americans, first settlers and all of that. Then we went into town, that was a late Sunday afternoon. We went into town and were standing there and, “Oh, that sign over there. It says the Gingaskin Reservation Native American man, reservation may have been six miles north. And we were like, “It's getting dark. No, we got to go.” So we went, followed the road. It was like a straight road. So we went out there and when we got to the gate it says “Indian Town.” And so we said, “Oh, okay." Everything is sort of, you know, Native American reservation, this place is called Indian Town. And so we drove through the gate and we figured out later on that Native Americans has to go to where the ancestors are. Some other cultures may read them in books and be satisfied. We ain't satisfied. So we went over there and saw Indian Town and read a couple of markers and then we says, “Oh, okay, well, it's here and we'll come back tomorrow morning.” So we went back to the hotel and talked about it all night. Exhilarating, it was, to be on some

grounds that our ancestors may have been. So the next morning we got up and we went to the courthouse. And he said, “Why are we going to the courthouse?" I says, “I'm an engineer. So I know that there's some records somewhere.” So we went in the courthouse and we asked the record section of it, we asked about the Gingaskin Reservation and did you have any information. And the young lady played us off. “No, the person that you need to ask that question is in the courts now.” And we're like, “This is Monday.” So she thinks we're so dumb we don't know the court system. We said, “Well, okay. Well, what time should we be back?" “I don't know.” And I told my brother, “Just be chilly. We ain't leaving here until they--we find out something.” So I said, “Just sit over here. Let's sit here.”

PF: Why would they not? It's public record?

RH: They didn't want to take the time. But that's sometime what you run into. We're in a public records place, but they didn't really want to deal with us then. And so we were sitting there and I said, “Well, let's just sit here.” She kept looking up from her computer. And then finally there was a guy over there and he--we were talking among ourself, and he says, “What are you all looking for?" And we said, “We're looking for records of proof that the Gingaskin Reservation existed and where it may have been located.” And he said, “Okay. I know where to help you all out.” And so he went over to the file and he pulled it out, looked through it and he says, “Here it is.” I'm like, “Thank you.” By this time, she had gotten word. Because he was a land--one of those lawyers that deal with land, right? And so he knew the right questions to ask, and he knew the files, because he probably dug through them a thousand times in his career. And we said, “Thank you.” Oh, now she gets interested. She comes over to sort of interact with you and we said,

“We would like a copy of this and a copy of that and tell us where we can find more information", and all of a sudden she's helpful. Because one of the things I had asked, I said, “Well, where did you sign up that says that you were helped in here?" You know. Because we would like to make a comment.” Right. They put someone on notice now. But we did find out finally the boundaries of it. And we said, “Okay, let's go back.” And so we did, but then we found some--he showed us some more information that we needed and what to look for. Because he was a land lawyer, land surveyor type lawyer and everything. So he said, “Well, you've got to come back. Here's some more files and this is where you'll find them and all that.” So we went back. We took off from there and we went back out to the reservation. This place where a reservation was now is a county park. And basically we figured out it was 52 acres that the county says now is the Northampton County Park. And we said, “Wait a minute. The words say that the reservation was 1500 acres. Oh, we're just on the very end of it, what this was.” And then I said, “Oh, okay." I said, “Get in the car.” He said, “What?" I said, “Since this is a straight line, if this is 50 acres, we'll just keep stepping off till"--next thing you know, we was 3 miles down the road. We're like, “Okay. I think this is where it started at.” The 1500 acres that was given to these tribes. Oh, this would have been the northern boundary of it, not the 52 that we saw down there.

PF: That was just closest to town or something.

RH: Right. So then we took a picture and I'm like, just hold your hand like this. In other words, our ancestors once owned all of this. Then we found out they once owned--and then we started to know more about Native American history and all of that land grabbing and all of that, we found out--we went back to the courthouse and says, oh, the

State Legislature had made some law to allow them to sell the reservation. And so our grandparents from that reservation got what they call an allotment. And maybe that's how they ended up--because we was tracking then, well, how did it get in North Carolina? And part of it was, oh, okay, well they sold their allotment on the reservation and then they may have moved and then we found out, oh, and they moved because they were intermarried. And we found a statement that someone had said that “them Indians over there are not doing anything with that land.” Never mind that for thousands of years they got the food, the clothing, the shelter off of the land. The statement by the colonists may have been, oh, it's not commercialized. So we're saying, oh, okay. But this whole story started maybe ten years ago. The matriarch aunt in our family was going to a family reunion in Connecticut and I was behind her. And she looked at the family reunion sign and it says--and she says, “They forgot about Polly.” And I didn't pay no attention--

PF: Now, when you say a sign, you mean like a family tree kind of thing?

RH: Family tree kind of thing. And she looked at it and she said--well, she was older at the time and we said, “Come on, Aunt [ ], let's find you a seat.” But it stayed there. “They forgot about Polly.” So now when we start researching our Native American a Polly name pops up. What it was is that segment of the family wanted to do their story. So they probably forgot about this story. And so that's what my aunt remembered, “Where's Grandma Polly?" We research the records and we said, “Oh, there's Grandma Polly, at 79 years of age and she's living with her son Hayward and his wife.” So she's 79, she was living with her son in that family. Then we follow her and it says, “Oh, Polly was born"--What it is, we're all the way back in North Carolina now, oh, Polly is buried in this cemetery out here somewhere.

PF: At the Indian reservation?

RH: Where we grew up at. So Polly was there among us all the time. We just didn't know it. My aunt knew it. Then we started researching, oh, yeah, there's Barrow cemetery out there, which is all overgrown and everything. No markers and everything. But death certificate says Polly was buried in the Barrow cemetery. So we tracked that back and said, oh, yeah, Polly is in here somewhere. And so now we know where Polly is. But now it's, the trail we're working now is, oh, we know where she's buried, but where did she come from?

PF: Now is her son still living, that you can get any information from?

RH: One son. No, her son is not still living, but one of his descendants is still living. So we're tracking that, we're following the paper trail back to where she was. It's funny, part of the paper trail says that where--remember I told you about my mixed race niece? She goes to town and one of the sisters in that family ends up in Oberlin, Ohio. Guess where my niece goes to school? Oberlin College. So a part of the story now is that when she graduates next May, my brother and I are going to her graduation. But we're also going to find out where her mother is, Polly's mother Elizabeth, grave is somewhere in that town. So we made this full circle. So we're going to find, not just Polly, but now we're up to Elizabeth, who would have been her mother. So that's where we are.

PF: That's fun, though, to have that to look forward to and mapping it out.

RH: Then it's basically to pass on to maybe Melanie, which is my niece's name, pass on to her and say “Don't forget about us.”

PF: It will be interesting to see how she reacts when she goes to the home place down there, too.

RH: But it's to pass on to her, as time goes on. “Don't forget about us.”

PF: Well, it's quite a story.

RH: But, as she, as Melanie has kids and we go off the scene, she comes on the scene and her kids. “Don't forget about us.” That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

PF: It would be a good place to end, as it comes full circle. Thank you very, very much for telling it.

END OF INTERVIEW.